

## Against the Grain

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### People Profile: Patricia Pinkowski

Editor

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The **Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services** saw a need to meet the information needs of caregivers. In September 2008 they launched an initiative designed primarily for caregivers. The initiative, **Ask Medicare**, includes a Website: [www.medicare.gov/care-giver](http://www.medicare.gov/care-giver), and an e-newsletter. This project was launched in response to the large number of inquiries **The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services** receives from caregivers on behalf of **Medicare** recipients. Information and tools are provided to help navigate **Medicare**, deal with billing issues, make informed medical decisions, and cope with caregiving pressures.

### Complementary & Alternative Therapies

Issue: Interest in complementary and alternative therapies is not new. But the scientific and medical community is finally paying attention. Reputable information and research in alternative therapies are rapidly increasing.

Once upon a time the only places you could find information on complementary and alternative therapies were in sources that were considered "quack" medicine, or in the ads of questionable magazines. The **National Institutes of Health** now sponsors the **National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine** (<http://nccam.nih.gov/>) to provide information, train researchers, and fund research. This is an especially active field for diseases and conditions that have no traditional medical treatment. Clinical trials related to complementary therapies can be found in standard listings such as *ClinicalTrials.gov*.

There is also a broader definition for what is included under complementary and alternative. It encompasses not only herbal supplements but things like art, music, pet, doll, and massage therapies.

### Literacy

Issue: Literacy levels have not improved over time implying that "easy to read" and non-print materials still need to be sources of information.

Health information literacy has been a focus since the 1970's. The **Healthy People 2000** and **Healthy People 2010** initiatives define health literacy as "the degree to which individuals have the capacity to obtain, process, and understand basic health information and services needed to make appropriate health decisions."<sup>7</sup> This definition is closely tied into the basic definition of literacy as the ability to read. The 2003 **National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL)** (U.S. Department of Education) showed little change from the 1993 survey from the same group. Thirty million people (14%) were below basic literacy skills. Sixty-three million (29%) operated at a basic skill level.<sup>8</sup> The **American Medical Association (AMA)** has recognized the impact of literacy levels on patient compliance for years and has prepared professional training materials and reports. In 2008 the **AMA**

## against the grain people profile

### Patricia Pinkowski

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**BORN & LIVED:** Born in Evanston, IL; lived in Wilmette, IL; Oxford, OH; Greenwich, CT; Bad Kreuznach, Germany; and Northbrook, IL, in that order.

**EARLY LIFE:** The area where I grew up was semi-rural — animals, farms, commercial greenhouses — but was still very close to Chicago where we had lots of family. So it was the best of both worlds. No one locked their doors. Car keys were kept in the visor of the car. You knew most people in the village. Most of that changed by the time I was in high school.

**FAMILY:** I'm single but have a large extended family in this area and have enjoyed watching my nephews grow up.

**PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES:** My first profession after college was teaching high school science. After I got my MLS, I started working in health related libraries and really liked it. I've worked at the **University of Illinois at Chicago**, **American Hospital Association**, and the **Alzheimer's Association**. I have been active in the state, regional, and national health sciences library associations and served on the board of one of our state multi-type library systems.

**IN MY SPARE TIME I LIKE:** The last couple of years I have been clearing out the family homestead and moving into a new place of my own. This has pretty successfully used up any spare time. I hope to get back to traveling, and volunteering at the local botanical garden.

**FAVORITE BOOKS:** Lately I've been recommending *People of the Book*. I like mysteries and am taking a seminar on the detective novel at the **Newberry Library** here in Chicago. If I find an author I like, I try to read everything they have written, but in chronological order. It is interesting to see how their style develops through the books.

**PET PEEVES/WHAT MAKES ME MAD:** Bad drivers.

**PHILOSOPHY:** You can't win if you give up — that's the philosophy, the practice of it is much harder.

**MOST MEANINGFUL CAREER ACHIEVEMENT:** Starting up a library from scratch for the Alzheimer's Association and have it still be open 18 years later.

**GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW:** Successfully transition to retirement.

**HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS:** Five years from now I don't think we will be tied down to a desktop or laptop computer. They will be smaller, very portable and multipurpose. There will still be books, AV's, and probably some new media we haven't thought of yet. But the systems to manage them will be less cumbersome. 🐾



**Foundation** released a report, "Assessing the Nation's Health Literacy," commenting on the health implications of the **NAAL** literacy report.<sup>9</sup> Those at the lowest end of the literacy range were less likely to use either the Internet or written materials to get health information. They were more likely to rely on information from TV and radio, health care professionals, and what they were told by family and friends.

Since its inception in 1991 our library has experienced a great demand for video and DVD products. The **Food and Drug Administration**, the **National Cancer Institute**, and most of the **National Institutes of Health** now provide "easy to read" materials. The **Alzheimer's Association** has tried to be aware

of literacy levels in our publications, both in print and on the Website. Former wisdom was to write materials at a 5th grade level. Recent comments have been that this is now considered too high and materials need to be written at a 3rd grade level.

### Additional Information

No matter if they have longtime experience in serving consumer health information needs, or are just getting started in this area, librarians can still rely on professional colleagues who share their knowledge in the literature and through library association sections.

*Library Journal* (2004-2005) volume 53, issues two and three focused on "Consumer

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